Preface to Chinese translations/Bujold/1

Note from LMB: My Chinese publisher Science Fiction World (located in Chengdu, Szechwan) which brought out most of the Vorkosigan books in trade paperback format in Chinese Simplified Characters a few years ago, asked for a brief introduction to the Miles books for their Chinese audience.

PREFACE

In 1982, when I began writing my first novel (which also proved to be the first of the Vorkosigan series) in a small town in the American Midwest, the idea of my science fiction books being published in China would have seemed like science fiction itself–like some tale from the twenty-first century.

Ah... indeed.

So here we all are in the future, which, while still notably lacking in moonbases and aircars, contains enough wonders for most practical purposes. Imperfect as the world may yet and always be, this future has also proved brighter than some of the bleaker apocalyptic SF visions I read in my atomic-threatened youth in the middle of the past century. No one much seems to be scrabbling around in the radioactive ruins fighting off the mutants, at least not on any large scale. Instead, we find ourselves immersed in the most abundant boom time for ideas and art in human history. Not always, necessarily, *good* ideas or art, mind you, but there is unquestionably a stunning amount to choose from. "Quantity has a quality all its own," the saying goes, and I think that's more subtly true than the jokey word-play (in English) would suggest, when the object is information itself.

The Vorkosigan series was not written as stuffy-dull Serious Futurism (I prefer my futurism to be witty and sly), but as take-you-away adventure tales to please, firstly, myself, and secondly, anyone else who cared to come along for the ride. To my delight, many people have. The fourteen books of the Vorkosigan series have been translated into nineteen languages world-wide, and have all been continuously in print in the United States since the first three were released in 1986. Along the way they have collected a heartening number of genre awards.

Although the Miles stories play out against a backdrop of galactic space adventure, both the science and the plots in my science fiction focus mostly on changes in biology, genetics, and medicine, exploring the impact of such advances on social structures, gender relations, and most of all, my characters' busy lives. I am not a big believer in my colleague Vernor Vinge's theories of "the Singularity,"

the notion that in the very near future humanity will change beyond imagining and recognition, because as a person and a parent I have experienced how grounded people remain in the physicality of our bodies, at the dubious mercy of the flow of time. The Singularity appears to me to appeal to guys who like to think they popped into existence fully formed at the age of twenty-two, conveniently forgetting all the messy work (mostly not theirs) that it took to get them there. The notion remains an excellent metaphor for wrenching change, but I suspect the reality will play out quite differently, and not at all neatly. In my own works, I try to suggest that many different ideas for how to live will co-exist and compete, not a one-size-fits-all future.

As a long-time reader of series books, I have experienced the usual frustrations of not being able to find episodes of multi-part works in order, or, in some cases, at all. So as a writer, one of my early concerns was to make each book I wrote work simultaneously as a stand-alone tale, complete in one volume, and as a supporting pillar of the larger series arch. Since works in translation tend to appear in an even more erratic order than they do on the shelves of American bookstores, this plan has paid off well for my readers around the world. I've tried to give every volume a proper beginning, middle, and end. While providing everything needed to follow the action at hand, I also have tried to avoid clumsy and repetitive recapitulations of prior episodes. As a result, the series can still provide suspense and surprise no matter what order it is read in.

Readers have e-mailed me telling of starting in just about every possible combination and still enjoying how the works unfold. Which order is "best" seems to provide fodder for perpetual, if pleasant, debate among readers. I have learned, when Googling up my name on the Internet, how to recognize a Bujold-reading-order thread in languages I do not speak, in alphabets I cannot decipher, just by the way the pattern of titles falls on the page.

The author's own advice is: Begin where you are, and go on as you can. Which is not bad advice for life generally, come to think of it.

Anyway, I am delighted that Science Fiction World has brought my books in translation to China. I hope that Miles, his family, friends, and enemies (not to mention his "forward momentum") have a chance to thrill and please an all-new audience, here in the twenty-first century.

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